

VBH BOT FYI Environment

From: RKosin [rkosin@barringtonhills-il.gov]  
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To: Dolores Trandel  
Cc: Sarah Kenney  
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Water, water everywhere, but...  
Lake County towns push \$252 million plan to tap into Lake Michigan

By Ralph Zahorik, Special to the Chicago Tribune August 6, 2010

worried about tapping out their wells and the possible risk of pollution, nearly a dozen Lake County communities have pushed a plan to allow them to draw their water from Lake Michigan.

The \$252 million proposal, which needs approval from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, calls for pumping water from a proposed new treatment plant at Zion and running it through 57 miles of new pipelines.

Towns involved in the project now get their water from wells that tap into an aquifer in the bedrock. Some communities are running low, officials say.

"We're seeing severe depletion," said Matt Formica, Lindenhurst village administrator. The village has nine functioning shallow wells.  
"Two are on their last legs. We have to do something. ... We're running out of water."

In Wauconda, eight wells produce sufficient water, but officials are worried about the next 20 to 30 years, said Dan Quick, the village administrator.

"No one knows if it will be here then. ... That's the frightening part," Quick said, adding that there is also concern about vinyl chloride getting into private wells from a Superfund site in the village.

The source of most of the well water is a vast aquifer that underlies the Chicago region and extends into Wisconsin, said Dan Injerd, chief of Lake Michigan management for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

"We're still withdrawing more water from it than nature puts in," he said.  
"Over time, we're depleting that resource."

Meanwhile, Lake Michigan water levels have remained relatively stable, "within their historical range," he said.

Nine Lake County villages plus Lake County are asking the state to allocate them about 17 million gallons a day. The diversion of Lake Michigan water for public use has neared a legal limit but it isn't clear if that will be a major factor in the state's decision, which is expected soon, officials say.

Under a 1967 U.S. Supreme Court decree, Illinois is allowed to divert 2.1 billion gallons a day from Lake Michigan. The state has been close to that limit for at least 30 years and has gone over it in some years, Injerd said. Stormwater runoff into the Chicago River basin is counted as part of the diversion along with domestic water use.

"I'm optimistic the allocations will be approved," said Peter Kolb, Lake County public works director.

The communities seeking water allocations are Lindenhurst, Lake Villa, Antioch, Wauconda, Fox Lake, Lake Zurich, Volo, Hawthorn Woods and Long Grove.

Lake County is requesting allocations for Grandwood Park and Fox Lake Hills, unincorporated communities where the county operates water systems. All are participating in the Northern Lake County Lake Michigan Water Planning Group organized by the county to advance the project.

Two other towns, Old Mill Creek and Wadsworth, have expressed interest in the project and have sent representatives to planning meetings.

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Most of the communities have contributed \$5,000 for planning and are being asked to kick in \$50,000 to keep the project going.

William Balling, a former village manager of Buffalo Grove, has been hired as project manager.

Under the plan, a treatment plant would be built on the edge of Illinois Beach State Park on the site of the Zion-Winthrop Harbor plant. A new plant is needed to handle the additional water, Balling said.

From Zion, water would be pumped west through Old Mill Creek to Antioch. A line would be built south from Antioch through the Fox Lake-Lake Villa-Lindenhurst area, and continue south from there to Wauconda and Lake Zurich.

The \$252 million construction cost could be raised through bond issues or special service areas requiring referendums.

Engineers have estimated the average cost of water per residence at \$426 a year, Balling said.

"The technical argument for this project is compelling," Balling said. "The communities that went to lake water in the 1980s and 1990s never went back to wells. It's been an amazing infrastructure success."

With wells, even with an aggressive conservation program, water would still have to be removed from the aquifer, he said, adding, "There's been some recovery of groundwater level, but no hydrologist can tell you how much groundwater is under Lake County."

If the project goes forward, all but about 20 percent of Lake County will be on Lake Michigan water instead of well water.

The Northern Lake County project would be the second Lake Michigan joint action water agency in the county. The Central Lake County Joint Action Water Agency was completed in 1992 and supplies water from a Lake Bluff treatment plant to a dozen inland villages.

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